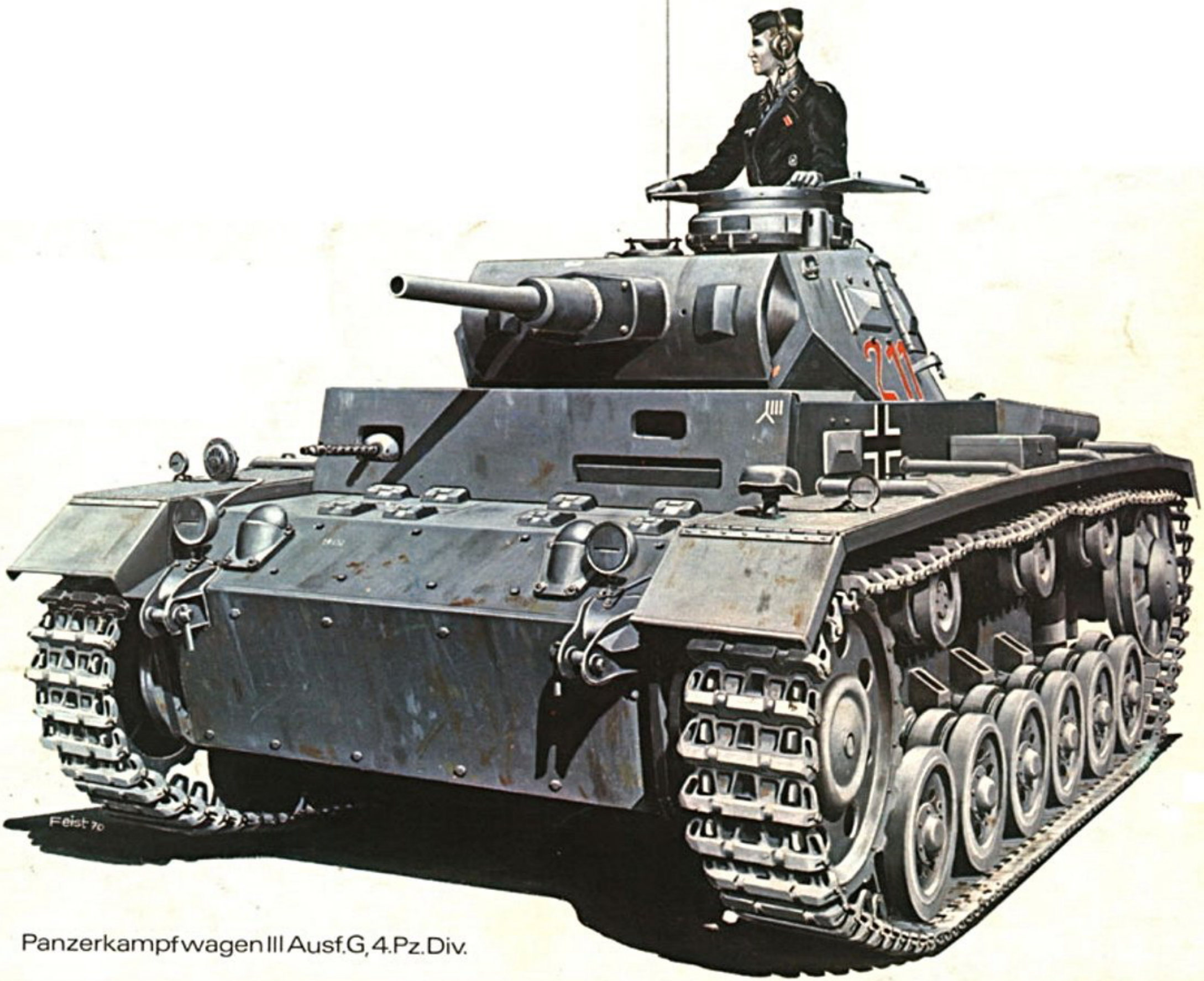
2001.

SIGNAL Panzer III IN ACTION

ARMOR NUMBER 1



Panzerkampfwagen III Ausf.G, 4.Pz.Div.

PANZER III in ACTION

squadron/signal publications

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INTRODUCTION

PANZER III IN ACTION is a new concept. Between the covers of this book can be found some of the finest German wartime photographs ever taken. There is no text to speak of, since we feel there are enough publications available describing Panzers in detail, but lacking the photo coverage that the discriminating collector and model builder is seeking.

Each of the photos is unique in the sense that only operational Panzers are shown. These are not manufacturers publicity photographs that have been seen time after time, but propaganda shots originally meant to be published in German wartime publications. At least 90 percent of the pictures in this book have never been published before and it is our hope that you, the reader, will enjoy them for what they are.

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Three members of the five man crew are shown in this picture, namely the commander, the loader and the drive. Armament of the Pz.III D consisted of 1 x 3.7 cm KWK.L/45 and 3 x 7.92 mm MG. Tank to the right is a Pz. IV D.

(Above) The first version of the Panzer III, the Ausf. A, of which only ten vehicles were built, was used in combat for th first time in Poland 1939. Armed with a 3.7 cm KWK, plus 2 x MG in the turret, and one MG in front, the combat weight of the Pz. III A was only 18 tons.

(Top rigth) The three following versions, Ausf. B, C and D had an eight-wheeled suspension system in common. Only the spring arrangement was different. Picture sohows a model D during the Polish campaing in 1939. Helmets on the rear of the tank are from Polish Army.

(Right) The E version of the Panzer III shows the torsion bar suspension system which was typical of all these production models. Drive wheels and spacing of return rollers were typical for models E through G.

(Left) This picture of a bogged down Panzer III shows the layout of the engine compartment and the cooling air intakes on both sides. The aerial was protected by means of a rail when in down position, vehicle is stripped of most of its tools.

(Above) The first versions of the E model had the 37 mm gun and two MGs mounted on an internal mantlet. Later versions carried the mantlet outside.

(Left) Some of these units were in use at the beginning of the Campaign in North Africa. This vehicle is being refuelled by means of " Jerry" cans. Similar cans marked with a white cross carried drinking water.

Perforated frame around gun mantlet allowed for attachment of a dust cover in tropical areas. Spare track links were often used to increase armor protection. Vehicle is a Pz. III G of the 4th Panzer Div., Serial No. 65482.

(Above) Fording of inland waterways was most always possible. The fighting weight of the early German armored vehicles was limited due to existing bridge restrictions.

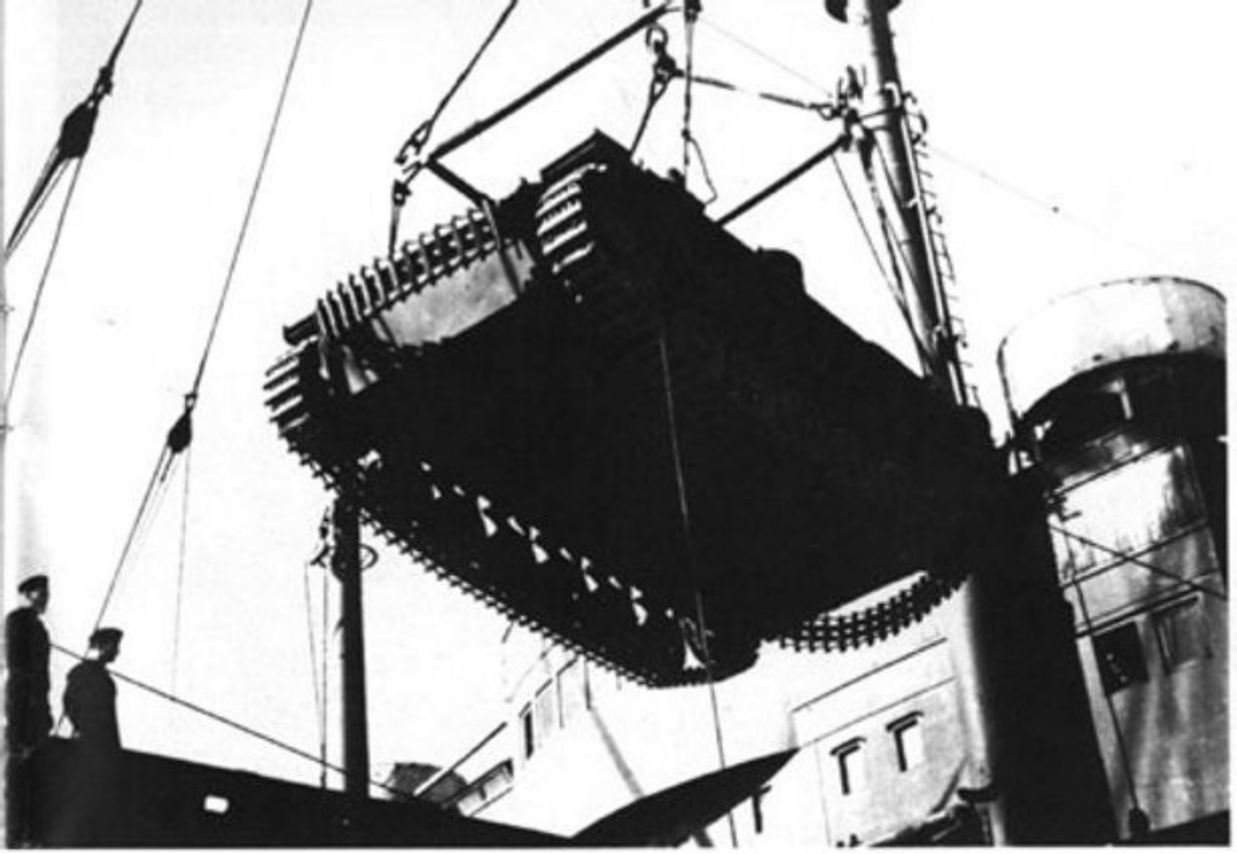
(Top right) - Panzer III Ausf. G of the 4th Armored Division during field exercises. Main armament carried was now a 50 mm gun.

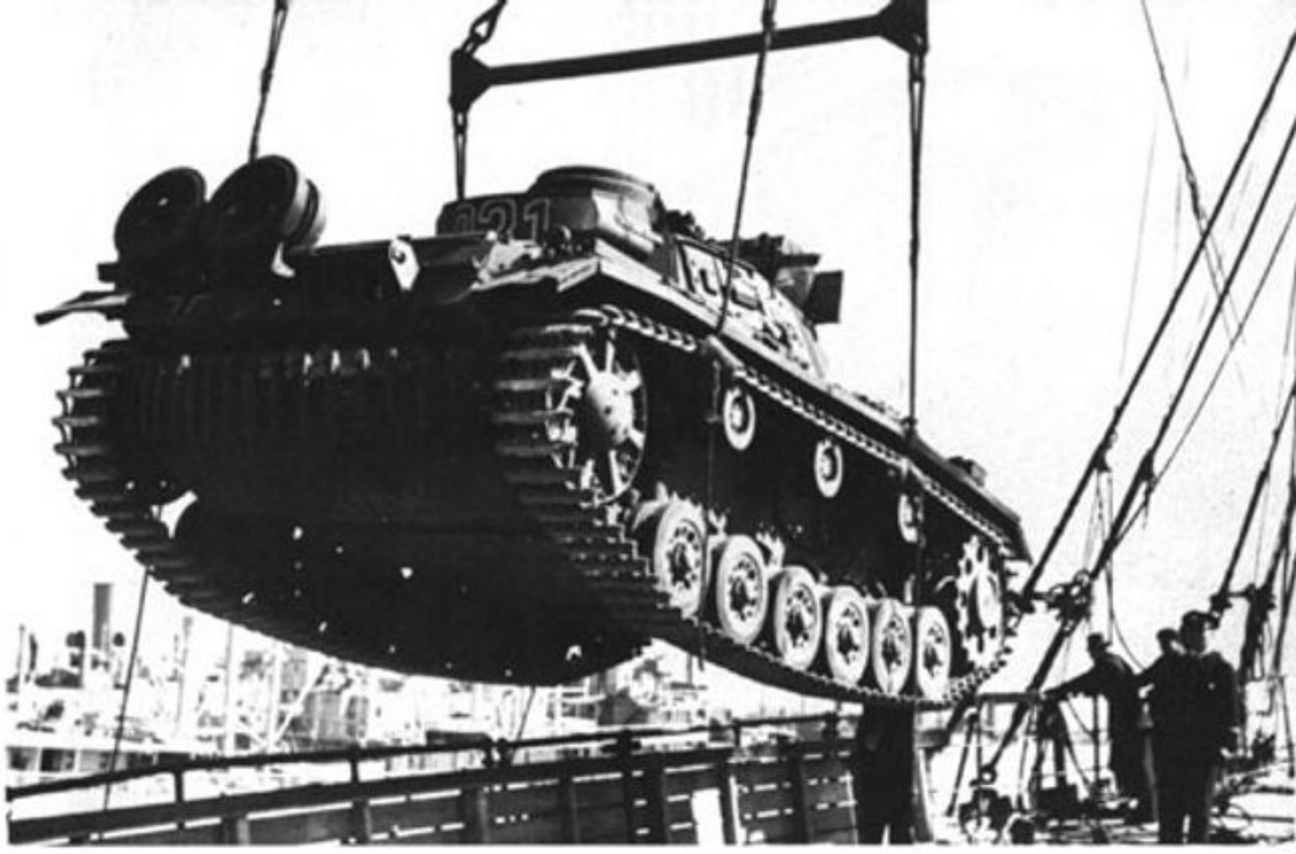
(Right) If the crew had to abandon the vehicle, the turret 7.92 mm MG 34 could easily be removed and used for close-up combat. Under fire the side escape hatches were used.

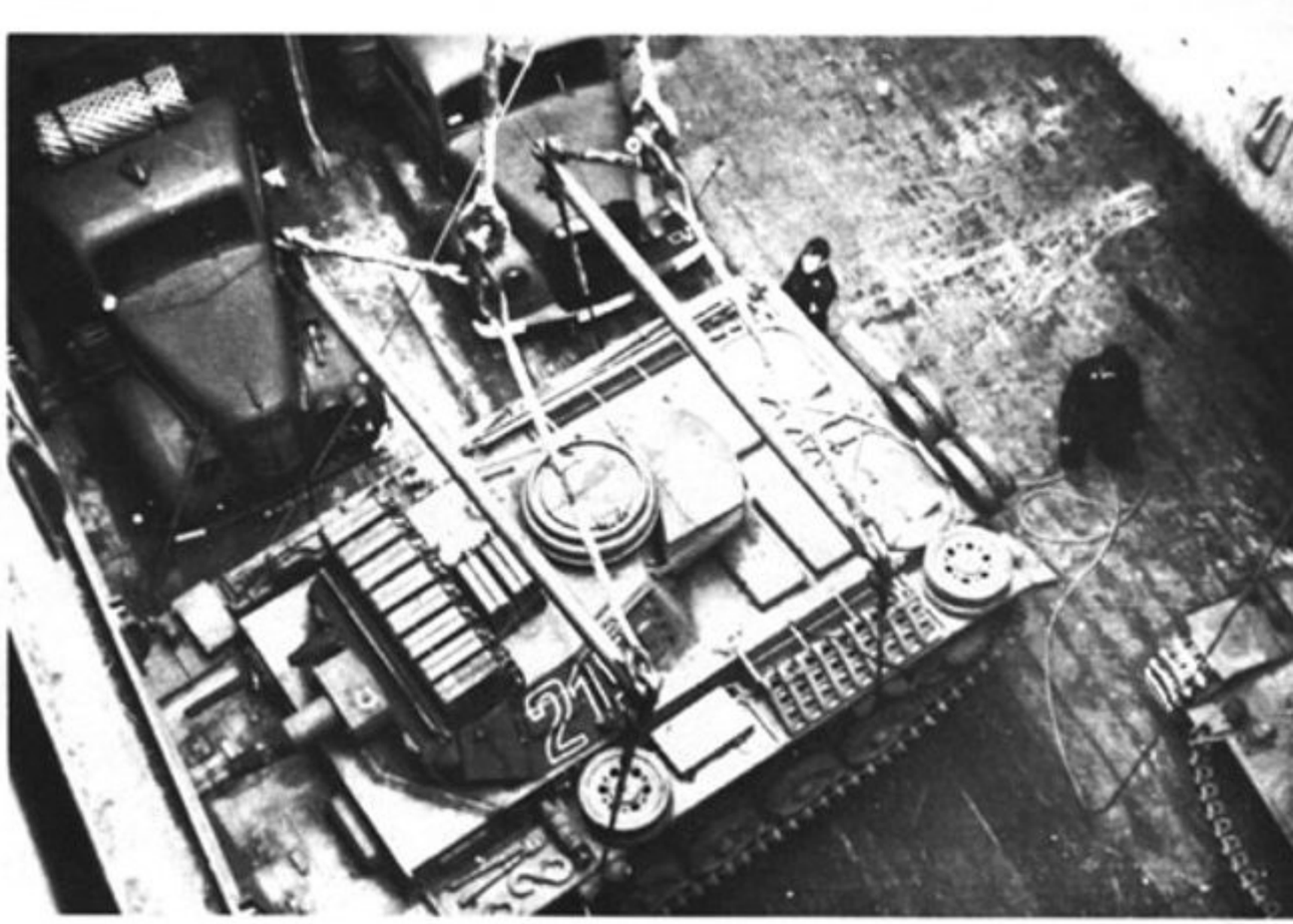
(Above) During the early war years, vehicles were painted in dark grey. A three digit number identified the vehicle within company and platoon. The German cross appeared on both sides of the hull. In addition, divisional markings were often painted on the vehicle in either yellow or white.

(Top right) Panzer III "G" during field exercise in France. Spare bogie wheels and track links were always carried on the vehicles.

(Right) A "G" version during high speed maneauvers. Note that front ends of fenders have been folded back to allow for free dispoal of accumulated dirt.







(Above) The main load of tank battles in North Africa was carried by Panzer III. Here one of these vehicles is loaded on a ship bound for the distant continent.

(Top right) Each vehicle carried a certain amount of spare parts.

(Right) Spare gasoline cans are carried on the turret roof. On the rear of the turret a container has been added to store belongings of the crew consisting of a spare uniform, coat, boots, underwear, soap, towel, toothbrush etc. and all the K-rations and other items essential for the fighting man.

(Above) Upon arrival in Tripoly, a parade was held before Italian and German dignitaries. Panzer II and III still in dark gray, are lined up on either side of the road. Tropical uniforms were later issued to the troops.

(Top right) A good close-up picture of a Panzer III in North Africa. Vehicle belonged to the 15th Panzer Division, second battalion, Abteilungs Hauptquatier (headquarters).

(Right) Soon the "Afrikakorps" was engaged in battle with the British. Panzer IIIG RO3 of the ordnance officer of the regiment's headquarter, on the way to Sollum.

(Above) The command Panzer provided the most important link between armored formations and headquarter.

(Top right) The torsion bar suspension of the Panzer III proved quite adequate even in most difficult terrain. Only the rubber-tired bogies wore out rather rapidly.

(Right) This Panzer III is accompanied by a captured British AEC "Matador" command vehicle, which was used by Marshall Rommel.

(Top left) A Panzer III accompanied by Panzer II on a forward position with the crew preparing the tank against an upcoming sand storm.

(Left) A battered Panzer III command vehicle of the 21. Pz. Div. in North Africa. Note the shell impact close to the turret MG. Soldier is wearing a fur lined jacket for protection against the severely cold nights of the desert.

(Above) The new British six-pounder guns soon forced additional armor protection. Face hardened plates were bolted to both hull and turret.

A Panzer III Ausf. H on lonely patrol somewhere in Lybia.

In the meantime Russia had been attacked. Again spearheading this attack are Panzer IIIs. Spare tracks were abundantly attached to the hull to somewhat offset the deadly punch of the Russian 7.62 cm anti tank guns.

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Panzer III passing an armored command vehicle of the Heeresgruppe (Army Group) von Kleist in Russia. Motorcycles were used for messenger duties.

A Panzer III Ausf. M outfit in Russia. Vehicle is typical for a 1943 issue. Note that some of the vehicles were delivered without the additional turret armor. Raw material shortages were

Pz. III Ausf. M with its armor protection complete. Tool boxes and other items were frequently added by the crews.

A camouflaged Panzer III is supported by a Panzer IV, followed by armored halftrack vehicles.

The "J" version of the Panzer III had received the long-barrelled 50 mm gun to somewhat offset the superiority of the Russian T-34.

A battle scene in Russia. German infantry occupying a village with Panzer III of the 14th Pz. Div. providing anti-tank protection.

To improve mobility in mud and snow a so-called "Ostkette" was issued to units fighting in Russia. These widened tracks helped negotiate difficult terrain.

Ausf. M of the Panzer III without hull escape hatches. Some of these units were equipped with a deep wading kit.

(Above) The turret escape hatches, together with a double cupola hatch cover provided easy access from and to the vehicle for all crew members.

(Top right) Against the powerful Russian anti-tank rifles and to protect against hollow-charge projectiles, skirt armor plates were attached to the sides and the turret of the German Panzer III and IV tanks. This picture shows one of the rare occasions when an anti-aircraft MG mount was installed on a Pz. III.

(Right) During a presentation before high ranking German officers, a Panzer III Ausf. L is shown together with other armored vehicles.

(Above) The final version of the Panzer III, the model "N" received the 75 mm/L24 gun which originally equipped Panzer IV models. They were now considered support vehicles for larger tanks. Tank shown is a command vehicle identified by an additional aerial.

The epic battle for Stalingrad marked the height of the German offensive in the East.

(Top left) This view shows the deep wading kit attached to the production muffler of the Pz. Kpfw. III (Flamm) Ausf. M.

(Left) Flamethrower tanks were issued to special tank formations and used only on special occasions. They were helpful in penetrating heavily fortified positions.

(Above) Pictures show vehicles during a demonstration. The Flammpanzer IIIM had a capacity of 1000 ltr. (approx. 250 gal.) of flame oil and a range of 60 meters.

One hundred of the "M" series vehicles were conveted to flame-thrower units. The main armament was removed and a flame-thrower installed instead.

(Above) A Panzer III is ferried across a Russian river, boxes on the rear of the tank held additional ammunition.

(Top right) Panzer IIIs on their way to a new assignment, pass German infantry assembling for a new attack.

(Right) Panzer III and infantry widening the breakthrough. Soldier is carrying a tripod for s.MG. (Heavy Maching gun).

(Above) Command tanks, based upon the Panzer III chassis, carried only one MG. Main armament was a dummy to conceal the vehicle real purpose.

(Top right) A command tank of the 13th Armored Division in Russia. Note the additional radio antenna mounted above the engine compartment.

(Right) Late model command vehicles were armed as their fighting vehicle counterparts. Only additional aerials identified the units. Note the second antenna mounted behind the turret. This is a "K" version of the Panzer III model.

(Top left) Since the fighting compartment remained open, makeshift covers were used to protect the crew of the tank retriever.

(Above) Tank retrievers sometimes used the unchanged Panzer III hull without super-structure.

Panzer III chassis were also used as ammunition carriers. Picture shows one of these vehicles supplying a "Tiger" outfit with 88 mm rounds.

STURMGESCHÜTZ III

The first versions, "A" through "E" came equipped with the short-barrelled 75 mm gun, a weapon which proved not to be too effective against armored targets.

(Top left) The first "Sturmgeschutz" units were used experimentally in Poland. Based upon the unchanged Panzer III chassis, these vehicles were intended for direct support of infantry formations.

(Left) The "E" version had armored boxes on either side of the superstructure to house radio equipment. If not used as a platoon-leader vehicle, one of these boxes was used to store additional rounds of ammunition.

(Top left) These unites soon developed into one of the most feared anti-tank weapons of the German Army. They supported infantry units during attacks as well as in the defense.

(Left) The Panzer III chassis remained unchanged. Only the two hull openings on either side were not used.

(Above) The effectiveness of this vehicle to fight enemy armor is indicated by this unit which claimed victory over almost twenty enemy tanks. Sturmgeschutze accounted for the destruction of 20,000 enemy tanks up to Spring of 1944.

The events in Russia soon rendered the short-barrelled main armament obsolete and in its place the Ausf. F carried the 7.5 cm gun 40 L/43. The barrel length was shortly afterwards increased to an L/48. Vehicle shown is of the Division "Grossdeutschland".

Left above: An assault gun with armour-plates (genielet) at the front. Here also the Zimmerit usual starting from 1944 is recognizable. It was intended against the attachment of Magnetics mines.

Left: Camouflaged assault guns on the march. The hostile air superiority made movements ever more with difficulty and extremely risky at the end of the war.

Right above: A damaged assault gun is towed. Here well the side skirts (against shaped-charge projectiles) are to be recognized. They were from 5 mm strong sheet metal.

(Above) A rare photo of a Stu. Gesch. III with smoke dispenser installed.

(Top left) Assault guns waiting for orders to counter-attack are seen together with self-propelled 150 mm heavy howitzers. Note the cover on the muzzle brake of the 75 mm gun.

(Left) The crew and some infantry men during a short rest period. Headlamp mounted in the middle of the front plate is the standard blackout headlight with which all German military vehicles were equipped. Stu. Gesch. III 101 of the Stu.G Batt. 287, Terek Kaukasus, 1943.

(Above) Another close-up, showing the seating arrangement between commander and gunner.

(Top left) The next picture sequence provides an intimate look at the various crew members of a "Sturmgeschutz" vehicle. This picture shows the commander identifying an enemy target.

(Left) The close proximity between commander and gunner is indicated in this picture.

(Top left) The diver was somewhat isolated from the rest of the crew. The vehicle's interior color was an ivory white.

(Above) The loader also acted as radio operator. Shells and radio equipment were stored close together.

(Left) The radio operator utilizing his equipment. Note large escape hatch above his station. A Sub Machine Gun was stored on the rear wall of the fighting compartment.

(Above) The loader also operated the outside machine gun against enemy personnel. Picture shows a MG 34 behind an armored shield.

(Top left) The radio operator as loader. Up to forty-four rounds of ammunition could be stored inside the vehicle.

(Left) Loading the gun was hard work in these confined quarters. Ejection of cartridge was automatic.

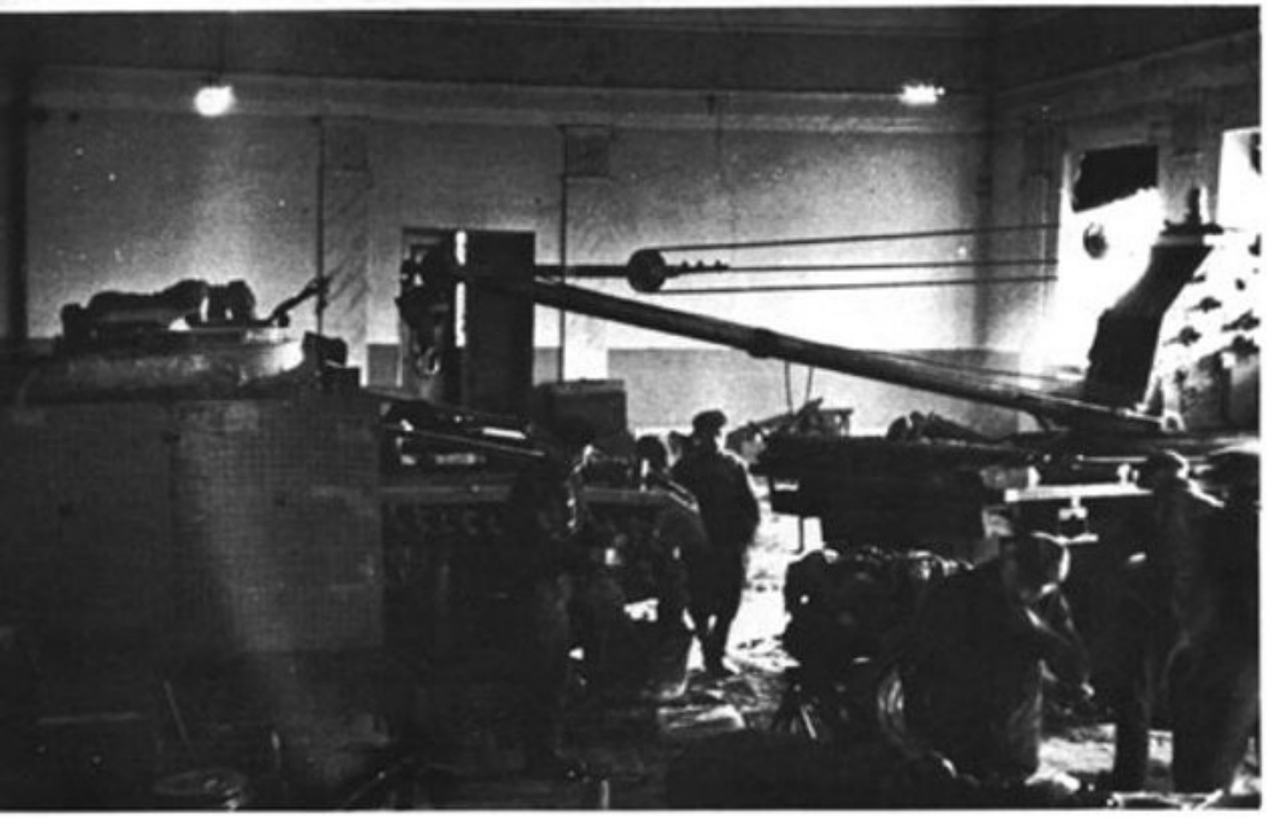
(Above) Ammuntion supply was most important to keep these units fighting. During the initial stages of the war, special armored halftrack carriers and trailers were used for this purpose.

(Top left) Advancing Infantry making contact with a dug in enemy. The loader is preparing his MG 34 to give fire cover to the troops if necessary. Note T-34 tracks fitted to the side of the Stu. Gesch. for additional protection.

(Left) Later versions carried a MG 42 in a similar mount. The MG 42 had a rate of fire of 25 r.p. sec. or 1500 r.p.m.

(Above) Handing the rounds was a job for the entire crew. Utmost care was used since even small nicks and dents on the cartridges could render a round inoperable.

(Left) The next two pictures illustrate the way ammunition was stored into the vehicles through the loader's hatch.

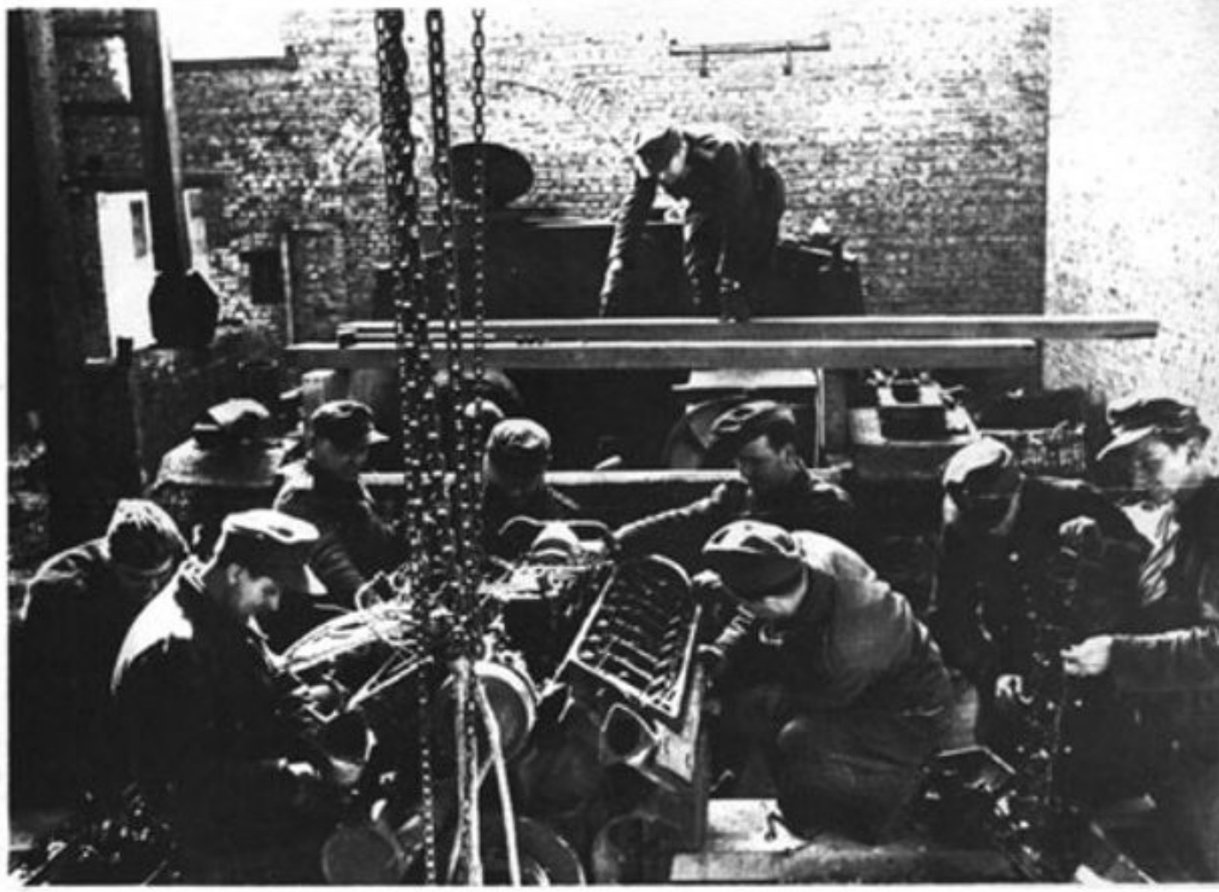


(Above) To save the vehicle's batteries for battle action, most German AFV's could be started by means of an inertia starting device operated by hand. This was not always a welcomed assignment to a crew member.

(Top left) Just as important as the ammunition supply was the supply of gasoline. The fuel capacity was 320 lt. (approx. 80 gal.). This commodity was never plentiful with the German Forces, as a matter of fact its shortage drastically hampered the movement of the German Army. Vehicle belongs to the Stu. Gesch. Brigade 244.

(Left) Field maintenance included replacement of major vehicle components. Here a Kfz. 100 wrecker is being used to remove the Maybach powerplant.

These 300 hp. gasoline driven engines were sensitive and demanded constant care. As with most tank engines, they had to be frequently replaced. The insignia on the rear armor plate indicates that this is Vehicle No. 7 of the 259th Stu. Gesch. Brigade.



Picture shows the cylinder banks of this twelve cylinder powerplant, with the cylinder heads removed and the valvetrain exposed.

A Stu. Gesch III Ausf. F from the Grossdeutschland" division after hitting a Russian land mine. The powerful blast ripped the running gear apart.

(Left) Another weak part on most all fully tracked vehicles were the steering brakes which were in constant need of adjustment or replacement.

(Top left) Material fatigue and raw material shortage sometimes caused premature explosion of a shell within the barrel. Picture shows a Stu. Gesch. III waiting for shipment back to the factory while a "Panther" outfit is being unloaded.

To keep vehicles battleworthy sometimes meant the exchange of main component from one vehicle to another. The next two pictures show the removal of the Stu. K 40/L48 from a Stu. Gesch III Ausf. G.

(Top left) Officers of the "Grossdeutschland" division during a short celebration in honor of a successful crew. The officer on the right is Hauptmann Peter Frantz who received the oak cluster to the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross, after his outfit had destroyed 43 Russian T-34s in one defensive action near Stanowoje, March 14, 1943.

A parade followed, showing one of the Sturmgeschutz passing the reviewing vehicle

(Above) One of the late type vehicles, showing the reinforced armor plating on the front plate of the superstructure. Also noticeable is the cement coating of the vehicle, typical for all German armored vehicles from 1943 on. It was to eliminate the use of magnetic mines.

(Top left) Two burned out T-34/76 give mute testimony of the effectiveness of the crew and their Sturmgeschutz.

(Left) The last production vehicles of the "G" version received a new cast gun mantlet, the so-called "Saukopf" mantlet.

(Above) Painted in sand and dark brown, the Stu. Gesch. III looks very impressive and is a favorite topic of the AFV model builder of today.

(Top left) A close-up shot of the upper part of the superstructure, showing the bullet splash protection for the commander cupola. The shape of the gun mantlet is shown in detail.

(Left) A "Sturmgeschutz" commander and his friend.

Late type "Sturmgeschütz" vehicles during a rest period, which was almost always filled with maintenance work and preparations for the next assignment.

(Above) On the Western Front, due to the Allied superiority in the skies, all vehicles had to be camouflaged completely if they wanted to remain effective. Note the peculiar shape of the skirt armor on this vehicle.

Sturmgeschutze moving past dug in infantry, to engage enemy tanks reported in the area by an advanced observer.

(Left) Back in action again, assault guns are shown carrying infantry during a counter-attack somewhere on the Eastern Front.

(Above) A typical scene of the vast countryside in Russia, with Sturmgeschütz units providing fire support for attacking German infantry.

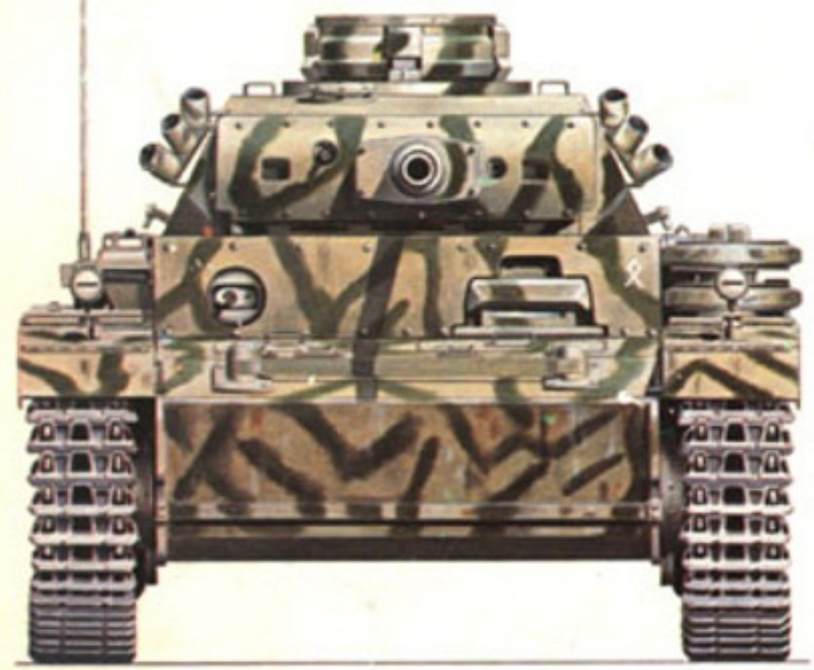
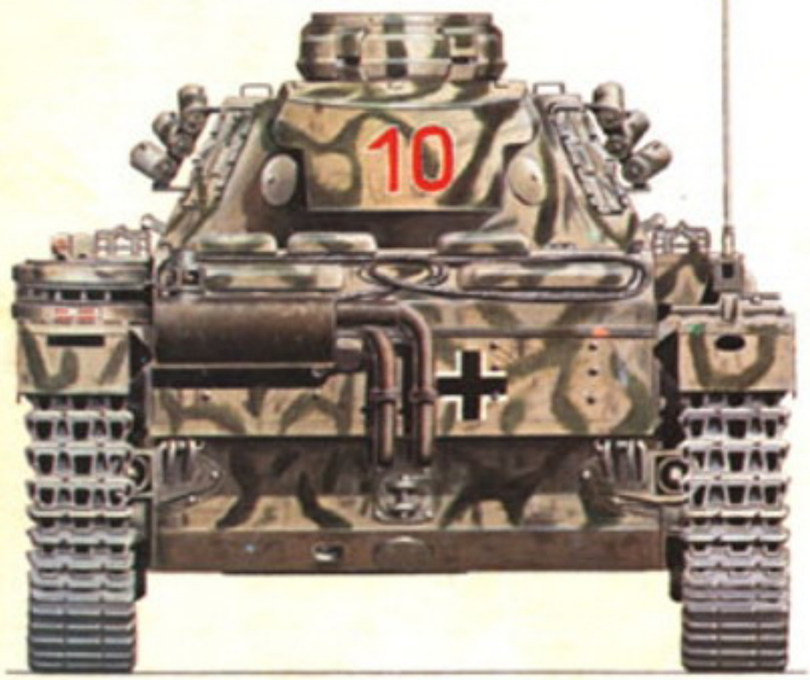
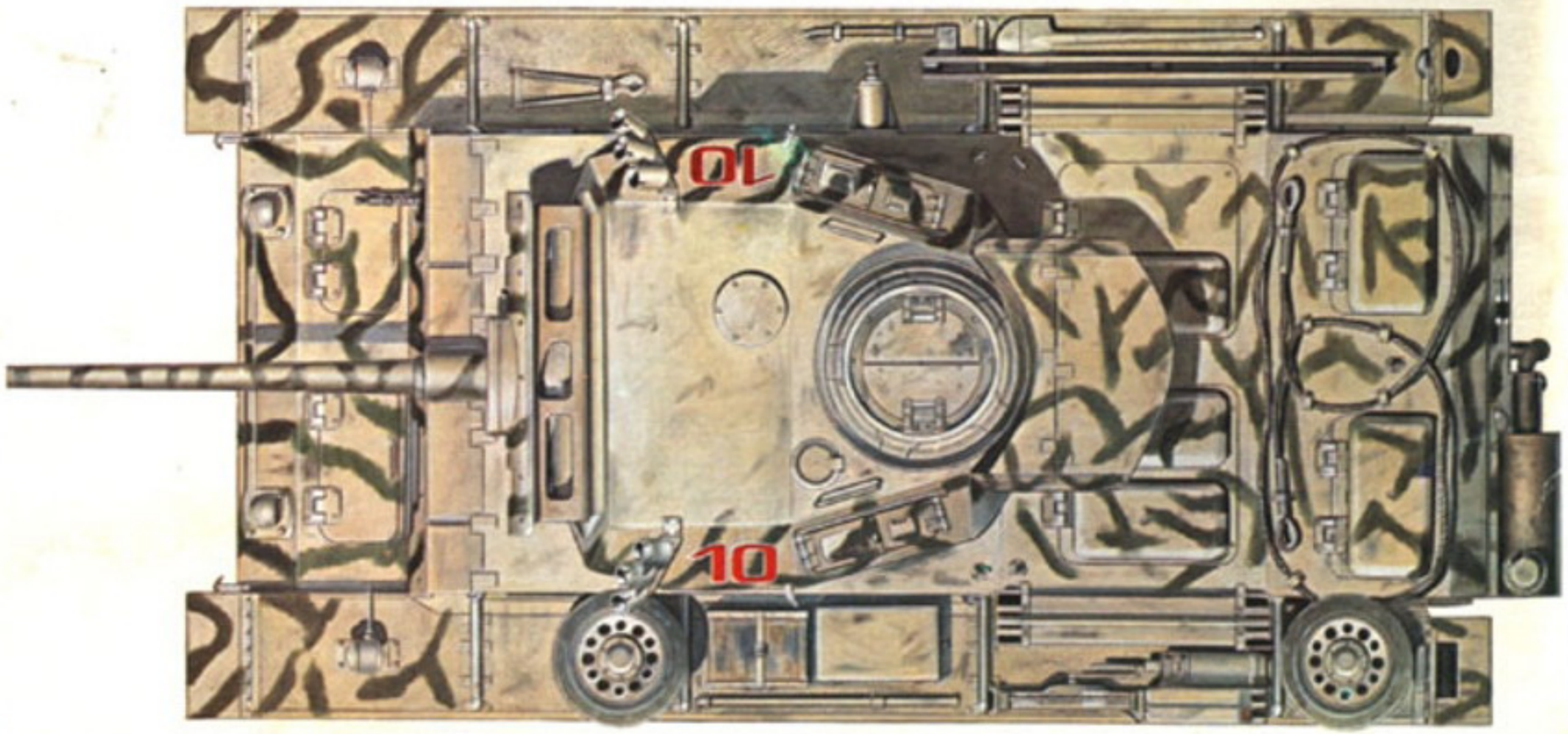
(Top left) Skirt armor was quite frequently lost during the battle. Replacement was rarely available.

(Left) Tank formations were often equipped with "Sturmgeschütz" vehicles, especially toward the closing stages of the war. Unlike the grey uniforms assault gun crews normally wore, tank crews retained their black coveralls.

Every smoke column marks one destroyed Soviet tank. This engagement turned out in favor of the German Assault guns. KV-1 and T-35/76 also heavily armored, did not withstand the deadly punch of the Sturm Kanone 40/L48.

(Above) The basic superstructure was identical with the "Sturmgeschütz". Only the ammunition racks were altered.

(Top left) The support version of the "Sturmgeschütz" was the "Sturmhaubitze", equipped with a 105 mm howitzer. Later issues of this assault howitzer came without the muzzle brake. Note the separate ammunition being loaded into this vehicle. Russian P.O.W.s often volunteered their service to the Germans, as seen in this picture, called "Hiwi", thousands worked in the supply units throughout the war.

(Left) This very rare picture concludes this action story on the "Panzer III" and "Sturmgeschütz" vehicles. One of the last versions of the 105 mm assault howitzer shows the gun with muzzle brake and "Saukopfblende"

PANZERKAMPFWAGEN III Ausf.M.
14.Panzer-Division,Ukraine, July 1943